

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 002434

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TAGS: ASEC AMGT PREL PTER EAC COUNTER TERRORISM
SUBJECT: SANAA EAC MEETING - SEPTEMBER 28, 2003

REF: SANAA 02410

Classified By: CTC AUSTIN G. GILREATH, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Begin Summary: The Ambassador convened an EAC meeting on September 28 to consider information provided to the Embassy by the ROYG concerning recent disruption of a local Al-Qaida cell targeting U.S., other Western, and Yemeni objectives. The new information, provided by Interior Minister Alimi in a briefing for the U.S. and four other Western embassies, elaborates preliminary information provided by President Saleh during GEN Abizaid's 9/20 visit (reftel). While the identified threat has been disrupted, the EAC decided to issue a warden message immediately and schedule a meeting of wardens later in the week. The EAC also reviewed security measures for upcoming public events and USG visitors. Key offices and personnel represented at the meeting included: POL/ECON, CONS, RSO, MO, FPD, POL/MIL, DAO, OMC, and SOC YEMEN. End Summary.

¶2. (C) DCM opened the 9/28 EAC meeting with a readout of the just-concluded briefing by Interior Minister Dr. Rashad al-Alimi for key Western embassies. Attendees at the briefing included the Ambassador (accompanied by DCM and RSO), the Italian Ambassador, the French Charge, the German DCM and the British Ambassador.

ROYG Briefing: Disruption of new al-Qaida Cell in Sanaa

¶3. (C) Alimi convened the meeting to provide information on Yemen's recent disruption of a Sanaa-based al-Qaida cell. (Note: Alimi's briefing elaborated on information initially passed by President Saleh in his 9/19 meeting with GEN Abizaid (reftel). End note). The Minister told attendees that the cell had identified a long list of Western targets, including: the U.S. Ambassador, the British Embassy, the Italian Embassy, and the French Cultural Center. Other targets included the Hadda Compound, Spectrum (a language school with no Embassy affiliation), and many senior ROYG officials and government buildings.

¶4. (C) Alimi said that only the UK Embassy attack was in operational preparation, but noted that the arms and explosives to be used in the attack -- which were to be obtained in Marib with money sent from Saudi Arabia -- had not been received by the Sanaa cell. He showed tactical sketches of the UK Embassy and shared detailed surveillance notes obtained from the four arrested members of the cell. He promised to provide the UK Ambassador with a copy of video surveillance footage of her embassy.

¶5. (C) Alimi stated that the cell had targeted the U.S. Ambassador's motorcade for attack on two prior occasions, but had been deterred by his security escort. (Note: Ambassador's detail includes both Embassy bodyguards and Yemeni police elements. End note)

¶6. (C) The Interior Minister said that the arrested al-Qaida cell members -- led by 'Amr Abdul Rahman al-Sharif, who is in custody -- called their group the "Cells of Faith and Unity," which was a part of a larger grouping called the "Unification Brigades." He indicated that the ROYG had no previous knowledge of this nomenclature, but stressed that the group was definitely tied to Al-Qaida. The individuals arrested and currently being held are of Yemeni and Saudi nationality. Alimi added that information about the cell had already been shared with Saudi Arabia -- specifically with Deputy Interior Minister Mohamed bin Naif, currently in Sanaa. Alimi added that he would also brief the Iranian Ambassador on September 29 and request Iranian assistance with the investigation, as one of the cell members was based in Iran.

¶7. (C) Dr. Alimi told attendees that although the imminent threat presented by the operations cell had been dealt with, attendees should review security procedures and exercise extraordinary caution. Dr. Al-Alimi said that additional ROYG security on targeted facilities had already been put in place. When asked how the ROYG was going to publicize the information, he responded that comments would be minimized

due to the ongoing investigation and the desire to capture suspects who remain at large. When presented with our duty to release a warden message, Dr. Al-Alimi agreed to the release of non-specific threat information.

EAC Actions

18. (C) The EAC agreed to issue a warden message and hold a warden meeting within the next few days. At Alimi's request, the warden message will not/not include specific details of the disrupted terrorist cell, but will advise wardens of a new threat and urge exceptional precautions. Taking into account ROYG security enhancements at Embassy-affiliated locations and all other locations on the target list, the EAC agreed that the Embassy's current security posture and measures were appropriate. Upcoming social events are to proceed as scheduled with necessary security measures in place for each. The DCM reiterated the need to practice vigilant personal security and avoid predictability. Travel outside of the capitol will continue to be subject to advance consultation with ROYG authorities. The EAC agreed to defer discussion of the Marine ball (set for November 10 on the Embassy compound) until a subsequent meeting.

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